

chamber of commerce guy, but he really believed in what he was doing.

I guess, of all of the things that I didn't expect to find when I got to Iraq this time, it was that slow building of the institutions of local government, which previously had been lacking, that building of the institutions of government at the local level, which heretofore I had not witnessed on any of the trips that I had made to Iraq. That was the thing that probably gives me the most hope for what the overall future for that country may entail.

□ 2100

When we got to Ramadi, we had our briefings. We had our visits with the health director and the mayor. And then we went downtown. We went to an area that previously was involved in very, very heavy ground fire and ground fighting for the control of that city.

Remember, Ramadi is a city about the size of Fort Worth, Texas. It's about 400,000 to 500,000 people. It was designated to be the provincial capitol of the resurgent caliphate in western Iraq.

Well, we walked through the market, and it looks like a very normal market in a Middle Eastern country. And you can see the look on the faces of the people there. They're curious about people walking through their market. Clearly, we did not look like we were typical shoppers. But you see the faces of the children there, inquisitive and friendly.

A lot of stuff available for sale there, much more than I would have thought in an area that had been recently so hard pressed.

One of the very striking things to me again is the faces of the children, very energetic, very engaged, very trusting. These two young men came right up to us. I think they were interested in if we had any pens or quarters. Clearly, the close association with the American military has taught them a few things about life in this country.

But clearly, a very different picture on the street in Ramadi than you would have encountered a year ago.

From a military perspective, there's no question that success has been made and continues to be made on a near daily basis. The primary enemy, which is al Qaeda in Iraq, has not only been beaten but they've been vanquished every time there is an encounter. Al Qaeda has now about three options: they can move, communicate, or shoot. And if they do any one of those three things, they are met by our military, and they are dispatched.

Because of the increased military presence of our troops in Iraq, the confrontations are more frequent, and you see that reflected in statistics coming out of that country.

From the government perspective, there's not a Sunday morning that goes by that we don't hear someone complain about the government in Iraq, and I'll do the same thing. It's as-

tounding to me that a country that young, a government that young can already have entrenched bureaucracies that exist within it. Iraq has a very centralized government.

But, again, I would stress the building up of the work that's going on currently of that sort of bottom-up work of building governments does seem to be a cause for some optimism.

Probably this conflict, unlike any other in our Nation's history, there are data points which are distributed all over the map. And anybody can take a handful of those data points and make whatever conclusion, draw whatever conclusion they have in their mind to make. It is going to take a lot more discipline for this body to look at the trends, analyze the data trends, look at the trend lines. But that's a discipline that we just have to undertake. There are people in the field who are counting on us to be able to make that rational, dispassionate assessment of trend lines; and it is the obligation of Congress to follow through on that.

There have been two or three years of serious brutality at the hands of al Qaeda, and this population now sees Americans as helpers and protectors. The tribal leaders that originally feared that the Americans would be occupiers quickly came to understand that the Americans have no such interest, but the same could not be said for the al Qaeda interests. Their clear intent was to hold territory for their own purposes for the foreseeable future.

The point was made over and over again on our trip that there is no easy, there is no overnight solution to the problems that confront us in Iraq. Unfortunately, leadership cannot be bought, and it has to be grown. It has to be part of an evolutionary change. But it can occur if the right environment is provided and appropriate, but not indefinite, time is given to develop those institutions of government.

Everything we have asked of our military they have delivered, they have produced for us. What we have asked of the Iraqi Government is still a work in progress, and we've set a pretty high bar. And it's a much shorter time frame than even our own country had available to it.

I think of the Articles of Confederation that ultimately led up to the Constitution. What if someone had said to us, time's up, and you've just got to get it done?

With continued pushing on the Iraqi Government and the recognition that there are cultural challenges before them, I am hopeful that it can mature into a stable partner for peace in the Middle East.

My opinion, my conclusion is that our presence in Iraq is still necessary. It's necessary for America's interests, not for Iraq's interests. I've said, and I think everyone in our group said every time we'd sit down with representatives from one of the ministries, you've got to show some evidence of success. You've got to achieve some benchmarks.

I think when we met with Dr. Sharistani, the oil minister, it's probably most evident. They've got problems in trying to achieve these benchmarks. Not every country that surrounds them is interested in Iraq being successful. Yeah, we all know about Iran and their influence; read more about it today. We all know about Syria and their influence.

But what about the Saudis? Do they have an interest in perhaps not getting that oil revenue sharing law passed? Well, this was brought up to us. It would have never occurred to me that this might be an obstacle to getting that law passed and enacted, but apparently there are some forces, and maybe even just some media forces within that country that work in a detrimental way to that kind of progress. But progress has to come and it has to be clearly evident for those on the outside. We perhaps have asked them to achieve the impossible in such a short time frame. But, again, many of us here tonight have made multiple trips to Iraq. Every trip I've made, I have seen progress, evidence of significant progress since the trip before. And I have no doubt that that progress has continued since our trip there the latter part of July.

Again, my opinion: it is in America's interest that we be successful. And to answer the question, is success still a possibility, I don't think there's any question after this last trip. The answer to that is a resounding yes.

I'll yield back to the gentleman from Texas, and I truly appreciate him calling this Special Order tonight.

Mr. CARTER. I thank my friend for his comments tonight. He led a really great congressional delegation over there.

My friend from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY) is here. He just came in. And I would like to hear what he has to say about his experience in dealing with this issue of the war in Iraq. I yield whatever time he may consume.

Mr. BOUSTANY. I thank my friend, the gentleman from Texas, for yielding time.

Let me start by saying, first, I want to thank our troops, our embassy personnel, State Department personnel and all their families for the sacrifices that they've dealt with as we've dealt with this problem in Iraq, this challenge that we're faced with.

I've come away from a trip just this past week and recognize that I truly believe that General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker are going to come forward with a very independent, unvarnished report about what's going on in Iraq. We're going to see what's working and what's not working, and I appreciate that. And I think that's going to be the most important report that this Congress will look at to determine how do we move forward; what steps should we take as a Congress with this situation in Iraq.

With that having been said, this past year was very difficult. We saw a lot of